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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/RSP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD -
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. ARMS PROCUREMENT BILL

Summary: As the Taipei dailies centered their coverage on local politics May 24, it is noteworthy that all major Chinese-language newspapers carried in their inside pages a news story that quoted Taiwan Defense Minister Lee Jye as saying the United States has called upon Taiwan through official channels to decide before the end of May whether or not it will purchase 12 U.S.-made anti-submarine aircrafts. According to the news story, Lee said the United States might sell those airplanes to other countries if Taiwan does not provide a positive answer by the deadline. It has also been reported that Taiwan has been informed via unofficial channels that the United States may not sell submarines to Taiwan. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, devoted half of its page five on Lee's appeal to the Legislative Yuan committee to review the relevant arms-purchase bill and Taiwan's defense budget; other newspapers focused more on independent Legislator Li Ao's allegation Monday that Lee tried to bribe him with a Mont Blanc pen to seek his support for the passage of the U.S. arms procurements bill. In terms of editorials, only the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" discussed the U.S. arms procurement bill, saying the military purchases are essential to Taiwan and a precondition for cross-strait negotiations. End summary.

"Time Running out on Arms Bill"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (5/24):

"Minister of National Defense Lee Jye told a legislative committee yesterday that if the deadlock over the special arms-procurement bill is not resolved by the end of the month, the US may sell the 12 P-3C maritime patrol aircrafts that Taiwan wants to purchase to another country. He said the purchase of submarines may also fall through. If the Legislative Yuan continues to obstruct passage of this bill, national security will be dangerously compromised.

"The political parties may well have different opinions on the unification-independence question and other cross-strait issues. But the arms-procurement bill transcends this debate. The pan-blue parties believe that negotiations are the best way to secure peace and stability. However, if Taiwan is left without the means to defend itself, it will have nothing to bargain with. For this reason, these military purchases are essential. They are a precondition to cross-strait negotiations..

"China might at any time seek to use 'non-peaceful means' to resolve the cross-strait issue, and any imbalance in naval strength is only likely to encourage Beijing to take this option. If the procurement bill does not pass, it is likely that this nation will find itself unable even to maintain the status quo in the Strait. ."

PAAL